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SUBJECT: IRAQ; US AMBASSADOR WAYNE; MIDDLE EAST; THE UN NEW STAGE;  
12/18/06; BUENOS AIRES

#### 1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Weekend papers cover the implications of Robert Gates' taking office as head of the Pentagon; the style of new US Ambassador to Argentina, Earl Anthony Wayne; confrontations in the Middle East; and the new scenario at the UN.

Business-financials "El Cronista" and "Ambito Financiero," as well as conservative "La Prensa" reprint a press release issued by PAS about the Eximbank re-starting operations in the country.

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" (12/17) and America 24 cable TV channel ("Ambiente y Medio" program, 12/16), report on last week's press conference with Terrence O'Brien, Deputy Director at the California Energy Commission.

#### 2. OPINION PIECES

- "Gates takes office with the challenge of Getting the war in Iraq on the right track"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nacion," writes (12/18) "... Robert Gates will take office today as head of the Pentagon. He incarnates Donald Rumsfeld's personal and ideological antithesis as well as that of US President Bush himself...

"When Bush summoned Gates, he resorted to the 'old Republican guard,' the group of experts that gave advice to his father and former president, George Bush, during the first Persian Gulf War...

"... In a sign of realism, Gates told the Senate that the US 'is not winning' the war in Iraq, and that a failure there could trigger a 'regional confrontation' in the Middle East. However, the greatest doubt remains whether Bush will accept his most shocking pieces of advice."

- "Kirchner's silent changes towards Washington"

Joaquin Morales Sola, political columnist of daily-of-record "La Nacion," comments (12/17) (page 39) "... Kirchner ordered support for the judgment of Argentine prosecutors who investigated the attack against the AMIA headquarters before the US elections.

"The prosecutors' judgment was timely for Washington because its diplomats have said that Tehran's theocratic government is not reliable enough to develop nuclear energy. After that, Kirchner managed to put part of the Bolivian crisis under control when he got Evo Morales to sign the first gas deals with Argentina...

"... Washington has recently announced that it will maintain trade benefits for Argentine imports. Business for more than 600 million dollars was at stake... Argentina is not the only country that benefits from this system, but the USG and Congress have the power to make exceptions in favor or against a country.

"... Another new element is the particular style of the new US Ambassador, Earl Wayne. He has a packed schedule of official meetings, which he makes public, and he also makes public his opinion as he tries to defend the interests of his country. He met with almost all of Kirchner's ministers, but the ministers asked for Kirchner's permission before meeting with him. Previous US Ambassadors were keener on private meetings and would seldom make their ideas public."

- "Earl Wayne, the hyperkinetic and media-driven US Ambassador"

Julio Blanck, senior political editor of leading "Clarín," writes (12/17) (page 44) "During recent weeks, he met twice with FM Jorge Taiana. He also met with VP Daniel Scioli, and a lot of ministers - Julio De Vido, Felisa Miceli, Anibal Fernandez, Gines Gonzalez Garcia, Alberto Iribarne and Nilda Garre. He is not the President of the country. He is Earl Anthony Wayne, the new US Ambassador..."

"He has already visited so many government officials that, not without a touch of paranoia, those who have not received him yet must think they have done something to irritate the Empire.

"... He often talks about how much the US helped Argentina to overcome the crisis and how it provides work for 150,000 Argentines at the 450 US corporations working in the country.

"... Those who knew Wayne before his arrival predicted he was going to attract some attention. And that apart from the arduous task of seeking to improve US image, he would try to increase US business in the country."

- "Deep changes"

Paula Lugones, international columnist of leading "Clarín," writes (12/18) "It is Palestinians fighting Palestinians this time, but the underlying fact is the everlasting problem of the almost 40-year-long Israeli occupation. Supported by the outcome of opinion surveys which show him as a sure loser, President Abu Mazen has called early elections, an 'elegant' way of getting rid of the uncomfortable Hamas..."

"The world has applauded the call for new elections but, unless deep changes take place, the issue will be stalled - no deal had been reached with the moderate Abu Mazen either. The US should take into account the Baker committee's report on Iraq, which recommends solving the Palestinian issue. Without a real political decision to stop this conflict, no peace will be attainable in the Middle East."

- "Bolivia - between re-foundation and civil war"

Oscar Raul Cardoso, international analyst of leading "Clarín," writes (12/16) "... Morales has openly spoken about the threat of a right-wing coup and the need to fiercely resist it. His adversaries have talked about obtaining 'independence' for four departments that make up the wealthiest area of the country..."

"... The bottom line of the discussion is the political re-foundation of the country, because what Morales is attempting to do is not only related to income distribution but to the distribution of political power, which still has a strong oligarchic bias in Bolivia."

- "The US asserts that Fidel Castro will die 'in a matter of months'"

Leonardo Mindez, on special assignment in Washington for leading "Clarín," writes (12/16) "Washington hopes that the life of Fidel Castro has entered its final countdown. According to US Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte, there is no doubt that death is winning the battle against Castro..."

"His statement is the latest in a series of similar predictions on the issue... Ever since the revolution took place, predicting the death of Fidel has become a 'sport' with plenty of followers both in Miami and Washington... The recent decline in the Cuban president's health has fueled this kind of rumors."

- "Cristina Kirchner with no an agenda for the US"

Mariano Obarrio, political columnist of daily-of-record "La Nacion," writes (12/17) "The Kirchner administration said last week that First Lady Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner would go to the US in April to promote her presidential candidacy and strengthen links with the US Democratic Party. But according to reliable sources, her trip has entered territory of uncertainty."

"... According to the Argentine Government sources, those who are organizing her trip are Argentine Consul in New York Hector Timerman and the head of the Council of the Americas, Susan Seagal..."

"According to government sources, problems appeared when some sectors of the Council of the Americas board, which are more related to the G.O.P., objected to the Council organizing a political agenda for Cristina Kirchner and least of all one that would be so oriented to the opposition party."

### 13. EDITORIALS

- "New challenges for the UN"

An editorial in leading "Clarín" reads (12/18) "Former South Korean FM Ban Ki-Moon was recently sworn in as UN Secretary General..."

"... His main challenge will be to make progress on the UN internal reform, transparency and efficiency."

"With Ban Ki-Moon, the UN will start a new era calling for a revitalized multilateral system that is designed to meet the challenges and threats posed to security, peace and human development."

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